

LAWRENCE-DOUGLAS COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT

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The total number of laboratory-confirmed cases of cryptosporidiosis as of September 4 is 46. The age range of infected persons is one through 70 years. Of the 46 laboratory-confirmed cases, twenty-seven, or 59 percent, are children age 18 and younger. Nine teen, or 41 percent, are adults.

Cryptosporidium found in the feces of infected people and animals can contaminate soil, food, water, or surfaces. An individual becomes infected with the Cryptosporidium parasite by accidentally swallowing contaminated food or water or having contact with other contaminated objects. We know that Cryptosporidium may be transmitted through swimming pools and lakes when swimmers swallow contaminated water. Within households and day care facilities we know that Cryptosporidiosis is easily spread person-to-person. For example, in a household setting a family member with diarrhea who uses the toilet and does not wash his or her hands, can contaminate food or surfaces that will then spread the germ to other family members. In a typical day care setting, diapering, shared toys, lots of hand-to-mouth contact and poor hygiene allows transmission of the germ between children. Hand washing is the most effective means of preventing Cryptosporidium transmission. Wash hands regularly, especially after using the bathroom and before preparing food.

There is no evidence, based on examination of data gathered at this point in the investigation, that the Lawrence public water supply is implicated in this outbreak. If public water was the source of the outbreak, we would have expected a sharp increase in the number of people with the same date of illness onset. Also, we would have expected large numbers of people with diarrheal illness among populations most vulnerable to the disease.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Kansas Department of Health and Environment are assisting the Lawrence-Douglas County Health Department in conducting an epidemiological investigation into the causes and extent of the Cryptosporidium outbreak in Douglas County. Next week we will begin conducting a questionnaire with community members, both ill and well, to determine how individuals may have become exposed to illness. The questionnaire will ask about activities interviewees have taken part in that may have increased their risk for becoming ill. The questionnaire will ask about food and drink consumption, swimming activities, travel, animal contact, contact with ill persons, etc. We expect the interviews to take several weeks to complete. The analysis of the data will then take several more months.

Last week, a health survey was distributed to Lawrence households through four randomly-selected elementary schools. More than 700 households, representing over 3,000 Lawrence residents, returned the surveys. The Health Department has been following up with those households who reported diarrhea on the survey. We found that 221 individuals, or 7 percent, reported diarrhea. Diarrhea is a very common illness in communities and we do not know what the percentage would have been if we conducted the survey before the outbreak began. What is clear is that we cannot assume that all these people are ill with cryptosporidiosis. These ill individuals are being contacted and advised to come to the Health Department to pick up stool collection kits and return them for laboratory testing as soon as possible. The Health Department will have extended hours throughout the weekend to continue to issue stool collection kits and receive specimens. In addition we have been calling community members and conducting a short survey to find other cases. As of September 2, 190 specimens have been submitted to the Kansas Department of Health and Environment laboratory for testing and 46 of those specimens were confirmed positive for *Cryptosporidium*. Some laboratory-confirmed cases of *Cryptosporidium* have been tested at private laboratories and reported to the Health Department. These cases are included in Health Department's total number of laboratory-confirmed cases.

Once introduced into a community, *Cryptosporidium* can be spread for months if the public is not vigilant about the key hygiene measures needed to stop the spread of the germ. Therefore, public health interventions have focused on measures known to help control the spread of the disease. The public health interventions we have undertaken since July 24 when the first case was identified include:

- Increasing surveillance efforts and case finding through local physician offices, urgent care centers, and the emergency room.
- Making phone calls and/or on-site visits to day care facilities to discuss sanitation and diapering practices, and to stress hand washing and disinfection of toys.
- Closing and requiring hyper-chlorination of some community pools.
- Preparing and distributing information to pool operators on how to handle fecal accidents.
- Distributing flyers regarding measures swimmers can take to help prevent contamination of community swimming pools.
- Working with the media to inform the general public about actions they can take to protect themselves from infection.

The Health Department has also worked to disseminate the following health information to protect community members:

- High Risk Individuals:
 - Immunosuppressed persons (undergoing cancer treatment, HIV/AIDS, organ transplant recipients and/or receiving steroid treatment) should be vigilant in following prevention guidelines as *Cryptosporidium* can cause life threatening, chronic diarrhea in persons with weakened immune systems.
 - Persons ill with *Cryptosporidium* should avoid close personal contact with persons with weakened immune systems (see above). If persons with weakened immune systems become infected, *Cryptosporidium* can be a life-threatening disease.

- Children and pregnant women should take care to drink plenty of fluids to avoid the dehydration from diarrhea caused by *Cryptosporidium*. They should consult a health care provider for information on preventing dehydration.
- Hygiene:
 - Wash hands regularly, especially after using the bathroom and before preparing food.
 - Wash hands after changing diapers.
 - Take extra care to wash hands and clean surfaces if caring for someone with diarrhea, especially diaper-or toddler-aged children.
- Day cares:
 - Children with diarrhea should not be dropped off at daycares.
 - Employees with diarrhea should be excluded from work.
 - Wash hands after every diaper change, even if you are wearing gloves.
 - Refrain from using swimming pools, water tables and other water-based activities while the outbreak is ongoing.
 - Work with children so they wash hands thoroughly with soap and water after using the toilet and before handling or eating food.
- Swimming:
 - Do not swim when ill with diarrhea or for two weeks after the end of diarrhea. *Cryptosporidium* is chlorine resistant.
 - Do not swallow pool/lake/river water.
 - Practice good hygiene (i.e. shower before swimming).
- Drinking Water:
 - Avoid drinking untreated water from shallow wells, lakes, rivers, springs, ponds and streams.
- Restaurants:
 - Employees should wash hands after using the bathroom and before preparing food.
 - Employees with diarrhea should be excluded from food preparation activities.

For more information, individuals may call the Health Department at (785) 843-0721.